



National Health Interview Survey

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

Health policymakers, public health program managers, researchers, educators, the media, and the public need timely population health data to guide their decision making.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC's National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) is a major source of information on the health status of the nation. The information is collected through confidential household interviews including more than 100,000 persons each year. NHIS interviewers collect information on topics such as health status and disability; insurance coverage; access to care; use of health services; immunizations; health behaviors; injury; and ability to perform daily activities. Additional topics addressed in the 2002 NHIS include alternative medicine; arthritis; disability and secondary conditions; environmental health; vision; and hearing. The data are used by health agencies and organizations, government agencies, academic institutions, and individuals to plan and monitor health policies and programs.

The production cycle of NHIS has shortened substantially. In 2001, the Early Release Program began to publish NHIS estimates of selected key health measures on the Internet. Selected data estimates are based on full- or partial-year data and released quarterly in March, June, September, and December. NHIS also collects supplemental data on specific topics. For example, in 2002, the supplements to the survey collected information for Healthy People 2010, Complementary and Alternative Medicine, and children's mental health. In 2003, Healthy People 2010 and children's mental health were addressed. In 2004, only children's mental health will be addressed.

Example of Program in Action:

Data are used by public health officials to gain a more complete understanding of the uninsured population, those with less access to care and those less likely to be receiving preventive services, and by policy makers to show the proportion of the population that lack coverage and to understand the shifts in coverage from private to public sources (such as SCHIP and Medicaid). Data from 2004 show the percentage of uninsured persons at the time of the interview was 19.3 percent for persons aged 18-64 years and 9.4 percent for children under age 18. A total of 51.6 million persons (17.9 percent) of all ages were uninsured for at least part of the 12 months prior to the interview. Persons with health insurance are more likely to have access to care and be able to identify a regular source of care, which is key to receiving preventive services and timely treatment of illness and injury.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

- Increase the value of NHIS data to users by identifying the sample for household surveys for the period 2005–2014 to reflect changing demographics, and redesign the sample to allow for greater racial/ethnic detail.
- Improve the timeliness of data for users. NHIS will overhaul the systems through which data are collected, processed, and made available to users. This process includes conversion to an advanced computer-assisted personal interview system and use of relational databases.